



VERMONT WORKS FOR WOMEN SERVICES FOR JUSTICE INVOLVED WOMEN

Vermont Works for Women (VWW) has always held strong values around the transformative power of work and the potential within every individual to take positive risks, face challenges, and pursue their interests as they develop a greater notion of what is possible. These values are the foundation of our work supporting currently incarcerated women, and women with a history of justice involvement.

VWW has been working as a contracted service provider for the Department of Corrections (DOC), providing services for the female population, since 2001. Our programs in the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF) strive to give each woman agency around work and life skills and support them to establish goals for their future. Our programs provide hard skills training in trades and culinary, access to a wide range of facility jobs where transferrable skills are acquired, and life skills for communication, conflict, stress management, and more.

Our goal is to create pathways for women where they can apply skills gained during incarceration to sustainable, well-paying jobs when they reenter the community that will lead to economic independence and stability. Core to these programs is a deep understanding of the unique needs of justice-involved women so that our programs and supports are gender- and trauma-responsive.

Our programs aim to provide motivation, connection, and support in facility that directly transitions to support in community:

Employment Exploration & Enrichment Workshops (aka “Enrichment Nights”)

Monthly, evening program (virtual option when technology available) introduces female role models – of a wide variety of backgrounds and professions – to tell their personal and professional stories, engage women in discussions about their own lives, and provide ideas and inspiration for moving beyond their current circumstances.

Windows to Work

VWW coordinates with CRCF leadership to support the in-facility workers program to establish job readiness skills, interviewing skills, coaching support, conflict resolution and restorative accountability methods, thereby increasing real world experience, transferable skills, and supporting resume and employment portfolio development. This program allows participants to translate in-facility job skills and training to employment readiness skills that can be applied at different employment partners.

Employment and Exit Coordination

VWW works with a transition team of community partners and DOC staff to support the Release Planning Meetings with an organizational focus on employment and exit goals upon re-entry, support direct pathways to employment, and provide post-release employment coaching and ongoing support. VWW also offers a class called Realities of Re-entry for individuals on the re-entry unit which employs somatic strategies to help individuals begin to process and heal, while thinking about closing the door on this chapter of their lives as they embark on the next. The course continues to build soft skills needed for the transition to community, offers financial literacy, and helps women set goals and priorities.

Career and Employment Exploration - Industry Recognized Hard Skills Training

VWW currently works with CRCF, DOC, and Contract Partners to provide job-readiness hard and soft skills training, based on facility capabilities and labor market needs. Training programs include courses and modules focused on industry-recognized credentials, paired with necessary soft skill development to ensure viable pathways to employment and release planning support. Training opportunities can include culinary, construction, plumbing, computer training, electrical, and additional skills based on facility capacity.

Inclusive Hiring/BEAM Pilot:

In 2022, VWW was awarded a one-time grant from the Department of Corrections for a three-year reentry program – BEAM (Building Employment and Meaning). The mission of BEAM is to provide justice-involved women in Vermont with inclusive employment and support services to ensure lifelong stability and success.

This first-of-its-kind program assists women who are transitioning out of CRCF to obtain gainful employment while providing support for basic needs as they work toward successful independent living and financial stability. In Year One, BEAM was able to secure a safe housing unit and a strong employer partnership with Middlebury College. While 5 women were served over the course of the year, the program faced many challenges, lack of community resources, and barriers creating difficulty meeting program intent and mission.

BEAM is currently transitioning into Year 2 of our pilot program with lessons learned. During this transition, VWW has worked to develop a collection of training workshops, employer resources, and a toolkit aimed at supporting a wider network of employers engaging in inclusive hiring practices and supports. VWW is working to enhance program connections with established housing units across Vermont that support women leaving incarceration, to better match our employer support tools, participants’ wraparound services, and organizational resources with their housing participants to support employment transitions in their re-entry journey. Over the duration of the funding period, VWW seeks to expand supports to a network of employers regionally located near housing facilities to create a more structured, collaborative, and informed pathway from facility to communities across Vermont.

Employment & Career Services

Our Employment and Career Services help Vermont women and gender-expansive individuals ages 16+ gain skills that can lead to meaningful work and financial stability. We offer personalized, one-on-one career coaching, resume and cover letter writing support, mock job interviews, access to job training and community support services, a career mentor network, self-paced online learning resources, and more. These services are free for participants, and we can provide assistance to women in-person or virtually after they transition out of incarceration.

Trailblazers

VWW’s roots are in training women to enter careers in the skilled trades, which continue to be fields that are more receptive to hiring justice-involved individuals. Our 7-week Trailblazers program trains women and gender-expansive individuals ages 18+ in construction, electrical, and renewable energy skills. Participants earn industry-recognized credentials and get hands-on experience through field trips, community build projects, and a three-week paid onsite work experience with a local employer who has participated in our gender equity training. In 2018, VWW offered a modified, truncated version of Trailblazers at CRCF, limited by space and tool access. Our hope is to be able to offer the training at CRCF, have women residing at CRCF attend our community trainings, and also create a pathway for women in CRCF to train and access employment in the trades upon re-entry to the community.



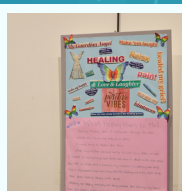
12

women served in community-based programs



195

women served in facility in 2023



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